



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

# COMMITTEE ON THE CIVIL DIMENSION OF SECURITY (CDS)

Sub-Committee on Democratic  
Governance (CDSDG)

## ENHANCING INFORMATION AND EDUCATION ABOUT NATO

Report

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Informing and educating the public about NATO is paramount to ensure support for the Alliance. Given the democratic nature of the organisation and the central role played by citizens in the formulation of the foreign policies of member states, NATO and the Allies must do their utmost to reach out to all audiences to communicate about the Alliance's structure, operations, objectives, and the threats it protects Euro-Atlantic populations from. This applies beyond the transatlantic borders as well. On NATO's southern flank, for instance, the Arab uprisings reshaped national political hierarchies and brought civil society into the political landscape. On the Eastern flank, the growing dissemination of disinformation about NATO makes it harder for citizens to access reliable information about the Alliance. As such, NATO must reach out to a growing audience to explain its role and continued relevance. If such efforts were to be underestimated or to fail, the public's questioning of NATO's role and objectives would create significant strategic vulnerabilities for the Alliance. The challenges faced by NATO in generating broad public support in Afghanistan illustrated that military power alone is not sufficient to achieve foreign policy goals; winning "hearts and minds" is equally crucial.

2. From its onset, NATO has understood the necessity of developing effective communication and information policies to ensure the public's understanding of and support for the organisation's role. It created an Information Service as early as 1950, which then became the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations in 1953. NATO completely revamped its public diplomacy programme in 2004 by establishing the Committee on Public Diplomacy (CPD) and the Public Diplomacy Division (PDD). The CPD, which consists of representatives from each of the NATO member countries, advises the North Atlantic Council on communication and information and is responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing the Alliance's public diplomacy strategy. The PDD, which is part of NATO's International Staff, coordinates and oversees all strategic communication programmes across the organisation. NATO's key officials responsible for communication are the Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy and the NATO Spokesperson. A separate division is responsible for military public affairs. NATO also maintains information offices in Russia and Ukraine as well as contact point embassies in partner countries. These structures contribute to NATO's outreach activities and communication about its role and policies beyond its borders.

3. Communicating about the Alliance is not an exclusive prerogative of NATO. Informing and educating about the Alliance is one of the main missions of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Its communication efforts aim to raise awareness of security issues of relevance to NATO among parliamentarians in Allied nations and partner nations. It also reaches out to citizens within and beyond NATO's borders. As part of these efforts, it engages with the younger generations to further increase their understanding of and support for the Alliance and its role. As such, it helps counter disinformation and dispel myths about the Alliance. It also fosters mutual understanding with the European Parliament and with other inter-parliamentary organisations.

4. Individual member states and partners have a central role to play as well in educating and informing the public about the Alliance. As highlighted in four case studies in this report, some Allies and partner countries have taken innovative steps to successfully explain their role in NATO and their national defence and security policies to the public. This, in turn, has often led to increased support for the Alliance and its activities. The report argues that the fruitful examples described below could be replicated across all member states and partner countries.

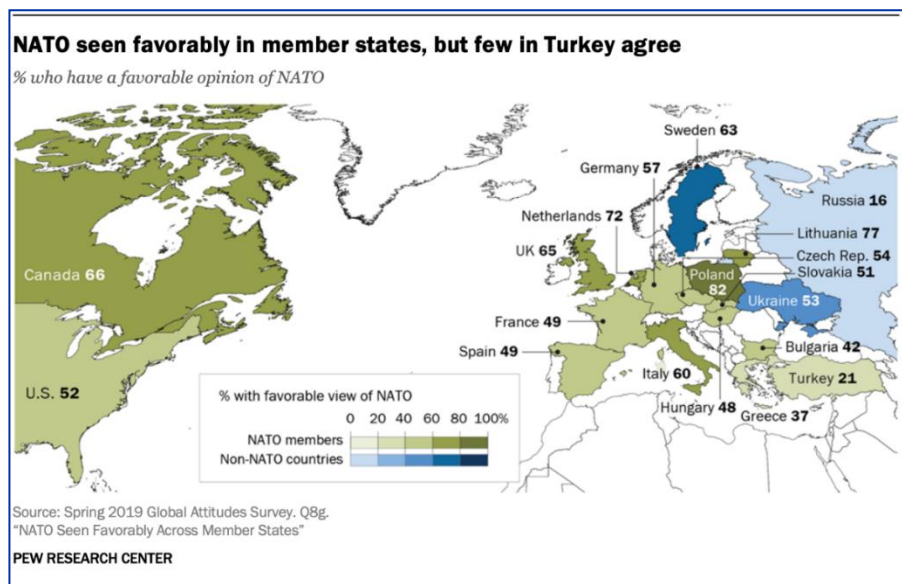
5. These efforts are crucial because, as history shows, a lack of information and education about NATO can translate into faltering public support for the Alliance. NATO's *raison d'être* and role as a provider of peace and security for the transatlantic area have been intermittently questioned throughout its existence. Although NATO's utility was rarely challenged during the Cold War, even the enduring confrontation with the Soviet Union did not prevent the emergence of internal cleavages. In the 1960s notably, popular support for the Alliance started fading as some European

countries felt that their voices were not being heard inside the Alliance and that the security of Western Europe was entirely dependent on the will of the superpowers. For instance, in 1967, popular support for NATO hit a low point in the United Kingdom, with only 59% of respondents viewing the Alliance as essential (Clements, 2019). Scepticism among the French public was even more widespread during the 1970s and 1980s, with support for NATO fluctuating between 34-48% (Ziegler, 1998).

6. The post-Cold War era posed additional challenges. Chief among them was the necessity to inform the public about NATO's adaptation to the new international context. Originally created in a bipolar world to deter against a well-identified threat, NATO had to adapt to the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the Alliance remarkably readjusted its structure, operations, and partnerships to the emerging international environment, its new role and purpose remained unclear to many of its citizens. The public was generally poorly informed about NATO's post-Cold War operations, crisis management, partnerships, and civil emergency planning activities (Babst, 2008).

7. Since the end of the Cold War, the information environment has dramatically evolved. This has created additional challenges for NATO in terms of communication and education. Citizens' constant access to news and social networks, combined with the interconnectedness of the public outside and within the Alliance, has turned the ability to shape the information environment into a key asset (Bentzen, 2016). As new technologies spread at low cost around the globe, such capabilities are now available to a wide range of actors. Russia perfectly understands the potential of hybrid and informational warfare. Moscow has waged disinformation campaigns to deceive and manipulate audiences across the Alliance and in some of its partner countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova. In Ukraine particularly, Russia's use of information warfare has shed light on the extent to which it integrates such tactics into its strategy (Laity, 2018). The Alliance now faces the dual challenge of unmasking hostile attempts while reassuring the public – within and beyond its borders – that it will continue to promote peace and security (Maronkova, 2018). In parallel, terrorist organisations like Daesh have demonstrated that social media and new communication technologies can be used as powerful instruments in asymmetric warfare (Laity, 2018).

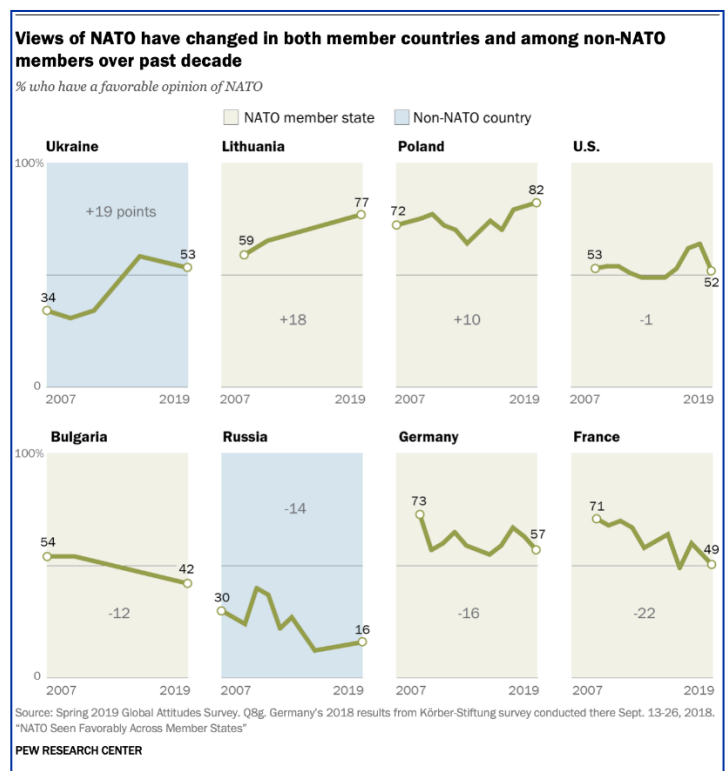
8. Much remains to be done today to better inform and educate the general public about NATO's crucial role in ensuring the security of the Euro-Atlantic area and, thus, ensure support for the organisation. Serious misunderstandings persist about the Alliance and need to be addressed. A 2019 survey revealed that citizens of NATO countries significantly underestimate the US financial contribution to the Alliance and overestimate their own countries' input. For



instance, French and German citizens evaluate their national contribution to NATO funding at around 15% – about three times the actual figure. Furthermore, surveys in Poland, Hungary, and Italy revealed that an important share of the population – between 40 and 45% - considers that NATO's purpose is to protect US interests. A similar percentage in the Netherlands, Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Germany, and the United Kingdom, among others, believe that NATO is carrying out military

operations in Syria, revealing the public's lack of information about the Alliance's operations and activities (King's College London and Ipsos MORI, 2019).

9. This deficit of information and education about the Alliance's structure, activities and operations has had a varying impact in terms of support for the organisation among member states. According to the abovementioned survey, favourable attitudes towards NATO are at their highest in Poland (60%), the United States (56%), and Canada (55%). They are, however, disturbingly low in key member states such as France (31%) or Spain (29%). Finally, only 30% of Germans consider NATO a force for good in the world (King's College London and Ipsos MORI, 2019). Support for NATO membership appears slightly higher but has fallen over the last few years. Between 2007 and 2019, support for membership fell from 73% to 59% in the United Kingdom, from 68% to 54% in Germany and from 54% to 39% in France. Likewise, over the same period, the proportion of people who considered NATO to be important for the defence of Western countries considerably shrank in those countries: from 52% to 42% in France, from 68% to 59% in the United Kingdom, and from 62% to 53% in Germany (YouGov, 2019). A recent survey of 16 NATO member states as well as some partner countries confirmed the same trend of declining confidence in NATO in the United States and leading European countries. However, a majority of citizens of NATO countries continues to support the Alliance. The survey found that 53% of respondents in the 16 surveyed NATO countries have a favourable view of NATO, while 27% have a negative one. In non-NATO countries aspiring to join the Alliance, the survey revealed increased support for the Alliance. In Ukraine, for instance, 53% have a positive view of NATO, compared with 34% in 2007 (for more information, see graph on the right-hand side) (Fagan and Poushter, Pew Research Center, 2020).



10. Efforts to better communicate about the Alliance must focus on young generations. In most NATO countries, they have never experienced the threat of a direct military intervention and are therefore particularly disengaged from security issues. According to a 2018 RAND Corporation survey, only 50% to 65% of US Millennials (i.e. individuals born between 1982 and 2000) reported being "very" or "somewhat" worried about threats such as authoritarianism in Russia, North Korea's nuclear programme, or Islamic extremist groups. By comparison, 62% to 83% of Baby Boomers (i.e. individuals born between 1946 and 1964) expressed concern about these same issues. Likewise, US millennials are significantly less likely than Baby Boomers to identify matters such as increasing the size of the armed forces, protecting the United States from terrorist attacks or preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction as top policy priorities (RAND Corporation, 2018).

11. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic represents a new test for NATO's ability to inform and educate the public about its role. Disinformation about COVID-19 and the crisis it sparked is proliferating, sometimes promoted by everyday citizens within our borders but more often by governments, particularly those of Russia and China. These false narratives sow confusion and doubt among the public and therefore undermine the response of governments and the Alliance to the crisis. NATO's communication and information efforts play a critical role in ensuring that these hostile, inaccurate, and often dangerous narratives are debunked using facts grounded in truth. As

such, they foster trust in Allied and partner governments and in NATO and contribute to the Alliance's response to this crisis.

12. In the context of this report, it is important to clarify certain key concepts. Public diplomacy (PD) is a common activity in any large organisation, and is defined by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence as "NATO civilian communications and outreach efforts responsible for promoting awareness of and building understanding and support for NATO's policies, operations and activities, in complement to the national efforts of Allies". Another concept relevant to NATO is Military Public Affairs which aims at "promoting NATO's military aims and objectives to audiences in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance". The term "strategic communications" (StratCom) implies a more ambitious and comprehensive policy which encompasses public diplomacy, Military Public Affairs as well as instruments such as information operations and psychological operations "in order to advance NATO's aims" (NATO, 2009). In other words, strategic communications go "beyond media messaging to help develop a targeted campaign of behavioural or social change informed by close knowledge of the audience" and seeks to develop a "narrative that is understood, owned and endorsed across society" (Cornish, Lindley-French and Yorke, 2011).

## **II. AN OVERVIEW OF EFFORTS TO IMPROVE INFORMATION AND EDUCATION ABOUT NATO**

### **A. NATO'S APPROACH AND INITIATIVES TO REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC ABOUT ITS ROLE AND OBJECTIVES**

13. In the past few years, the Alliance has substantially transformed the way in which it communicates to wider audiences. It has adopted an integrated and holistic approach to communication. Information sharing and education were identified as priorities rather than afterthoughts. PDD officers now attend all decision-making meetings of NATO's various committees and coordinate strategic communications across NATO structures, including military commands. These activities are based on pre-established communication strategies and integrated communications plans for the whole NATO family. In other words, NATO moved from traditional public diplomacy into the realm of strategic communications.

14. NATO's new communication policy is based on the "campaign approach", drawing on the experience of the UK Government's OASIS model. The OASIS approach defines the successive steps of a successful campaign: Objective, Audience insight, Strategy, Implementation, and Scoring/evaluation. This approach is audience-led and NATO has invested heavily in audience insight through polling across the Alliance to understand its audiences better. The OASIS model also aims to calibrate communication for specific countries as well as specific groups of people within those countries. Therefore, the campaign approach requires a much more active involvement of member states, as national insight and perspectives are indispensable in order to understand specific national audiences (Maronkova, 2018).

15. In line with this approach, NATO launched, in 2017, the *#WeAreNATO* campaign. It started with five pilot countries – Canada, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom and subsequently expanded to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, and Turkey. The campaign team identified three categories – young people, women, and those with lower educational attainment – as its target audiences, based on audience insight, which showed these groups were the least likely to be aware, or understand, the role of NATO. In terms of messaging, the campaign focuses on highlighting the Alliance's unity and solidarity and how membership benefits Allies. It is continually expanding as member states seek to communicate the benefits of NATO membership. The *#WeAreNATO* campaign provides member states with a toolkit of messages, images and narratives describing the organisation and its purpose. Nations then have to adapt the toolkit to domestic audiences. It has since developed into other activities among which digital and media communication, advertising and event sponsorship (Merheim-Eyre and Jacobs, 2019).

16. Another way of describing the Alliance's communications activities is by dividing them into four categories: advocacy; engagement; listening; and evaluation (Pagovski, 2015). Through its **advocacy** activities, NATO establishes a "one-way channel" to communicate with target audiences. The Alliance communicates with the media via a TV channel, a radio, VIP press events as well as other broadcasting activities. Moreover, the organisation publishes news, speeches, press releases or articles on its website, thus disseminating information about security and world affairs to internal and external audiences. NATO is also present on social media, among which Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, in multiple languages. In particular, social media emerged as a useful platform to counter Russian disinformation. This was demonstrated in April 2017, when the NATO spokesperson used her Twitter account to respond to a Russia24 headline, "NATO is preparing to attack Russia", that distorted a statement by the Secretary General (Maronkova, 2018). In a similar vein, the Alliance launched "Setting the Record Straight", a webpage that provides fact-based responses to the most frequent accusations by Russian officials towards the Alliance and debunks false claims about NATO.

17. In parallel, NATO establishes "two-way channels" of communication. These **engagement** activities take place online and via face-to-face interaction. For instance, the Alliance welcomes visitors to the headquarters (HQ) and organises workshops, events, and conferences featuring experts and high-profile individuals. It runs online courses and supports in-person training, such as the Strategic Communications and Public Diplomacy course at the Skopje's Public Affairs Regional Centre. In addition, NATO engages with and provides co-sponsorship grants to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities, think tanks, and other segments of civil society to support public diplomacy activities on peace and security. In addition, the *#NATOEngages* series brings together policymakers, officials from think tanks and universities, and members of the public. Its third meeting took place in December 2019, alongside the London summit (Merheim-Eyre and Jacobs, 2019).

18. NATO conducts activities to engage specific segments of the population, notably the youth. It aims to secure greater youth participation in *#NATOEngages* by inviting "Future Leaders". It also supports fellowships programmes, summer schools, seminars, NATO simulations, and essay competitions for students and young professionals.

19. **Listening** is another major element of public diplomacy. Listening to the public is indeed essential to understanding trends and shifts in opinion, but also to understanding the underlying elements that shape public opinion. NATO conducts regular Alliance-wide polling to understand its audiences and invests in both quantitative and qualitative research to ensure its communications are audience-led. It also uses online platforms and blogs to examine public opinion.

20. NATO has realised the importance of information environment assessment to enhance the efficiency of its communication efforts. Effective information environment assessment capabilities enable target audience analysis, as well as the evaluation of NATO's communications, to better frame and allocate the necessary efforts. It is also a crucial early warning tool, both with regard to hostile information activities and to upcoming topics or issues. The Alliance therefore seeks to develop the required capabilities in terms of technologies and human resources to make sure it will be able to manage a considerable amount of data. As part of NATO's strategy to counter hybrid warfare, Allied Command Transformation is developing a novel information environment assessment (IEA) capability. Once fully operational, IEA will use modern techniques such as big data analysis "to enable NATO decision-makers and planners to understand adversarial, as well as friendly, activities and intentions in the information environment" (NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2020). IEA will also play a crucial role in spotting disinformation and early warning signs of hybrid activities.

21. Centres of Excellence greatly contribute to NATO's efforts. In 2014, six NATO Allies (Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland, and the United Kingdom) established a Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga. Since then, five more Allies and partner countries have joined them

(the Netherlands, Canada, Slovakia, Finland, and Sweden). Four Allies (France, Denmark, the United States, and Hungary) continue the accession process. Although the Centre is not funded by NATO and is not part of its structure, it is accredited by the Alliance. It provides NATO with analyses, research, advice, experiments, and practical support on strategic communications. It also brings together the different StratCom disciplines (public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations) to encourage debate (Bentzen, 2016).

22. It is crucial for NATO to evaluate its public diplomacy activities and make the necessary adjustments if need be. NATO has a measurement and evaluation framework, which splits communications into inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact to enable robust evaluation and demonstrate the effect of communications with audiences. The evaluation process for NATO's public diplomacy strategy is based primarily on quarterly evaluation reports, which incorporate extensive social media analytics of owned, earned, and hostile communications, the analysis of feedback collected from visitors, the systematic analysis of media and press coverage, and a regular assessment of statistics on the use of the NATO website. For instance, NATO assesses the impact of its advocacy activities by measuring the social media presence of its networks of NATO experts or the coverage of NATO-related topics. The Alliance also evaluates the success of its engagement activities by measuring media engagement with events such as summits or collecting feedback about how participants perceived visits or conferences (Maronkova, 2018).

23. In addition, as part of the *NATO 2030* reflection process which he launched in June 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has made substantial efforts to stimulate a debate among the public about the future of the Alliance. These public diplomacy efforts have been particularly focused on three groups: youth, civil society, and the private sector. NATO has organised creative communication initiatives online to reach out to these groups. For instance, in September, it launched a video contest entitled "Make your voice heard". In this contest, NATO asked youths aged between 18 and 25 to share their thoughts on what the most significant threats to peace and security will be in 2030, how NATO will need to adapt to counter them; as well as how NATO can help to keep them and their families safe, now and in 2030. In another example of innovative communication, that same month, the Secretary General discussed the nexus between security and climate change and its implications for NATO with students from 10 universities across the Alliance in an online event.

## **B. THE NATO PA'S EFFORTS TO INFORM AND EDUCATE ABOUT THE ALLIANCE**

24. One of the main roles of the NATO PA is to foster better understanding of the Alliance's objectives and missions among legislators and, more broadly, among citizens of NATO nations. Since the end of the Cold War, the Assembly has expanded its efforts to various countries beyond NATO's borders.

25. The Assembly raises awareness among parliamentarians about the Alliance and the security of the transatlantic area, primarily through the organisation of fact-finding visits, seminars and sessions, as well as the publication of reports. Parliamentarians, in turn, contribute to sensitising the public at the national level and in their constituencies to the role and achievements of NATO. As such, they play an important role in reinforcing the link between NATO and citizens of Allied nations. The Assembly also reaches out directly to the wider public. In addition to the publication of the abovementioned reports, it uses a series of communication tools to do so, among which social media, press releases, and newsletters.

26. The activities of the former Working Group on Education and Communication about NATO chaired by Dr Karl A. Lamers (Germany) are a concrete example of the efforts made by the NATO PA to better engage citizens, and particularly the youth. Following exchanges with senior PDD officials, the Working Group focused on reaching out to younger generations at the school level. Between 2017 and 2019, it examined how schools across the Alliance teach pupils about security and NATO. In addition, it surveyed the existing national activities and best practices in the field of communication about NATO. It concluded its work by developing plans and recommendations for



improving education about NATO, as further discussed in the conclusion of this report. In addition, the NATO PA organises events to engage with younger generations on the margins of its sessions. For instance, during the 2019 Annual Session in London, some members met with 120 young pupils from 12 London secondary schools to discuss the value of NATO as it celebrated its 70th anniversary. In addition, Assembly members regularly engage with students in member and partner countries during Committee and Sub-Committee visits.

27. In addition to these efforts, the NATO PA seeks to reach out to parliamentarians and the broader public beyond NATO's borders. Since the end of the Cold War, the Assembly has developed formal and informal relations with parliaments in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Mediterranean and Middle East, and all the way to the Pacific. Through these relations, the NATO PA contributes to raising awareness about NATO in non-member countries. Engagement with most delegations from non-NATO countries, mainly in the Balkans and the South Caucasus, primarily takes place in the framework of the Rose-Roth Initiative which focuses on parliamentary dialogue and capacity building. The NATO PA also organises a NATO Orientation Programme for young or newly elected members of parliament from NATO and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) nations on the functioning and policies of NATO and SHAPE, and the Alliance's relationships with partners. Other Assembly bodies contributing to sensitising parliamentarians and the public to NATO and its role include the Mediterranean Special Group (GSM) and bilateral fora with Ukraine and Georgia.

28. Finally, the NATO PA engages with other inter-parliamentary organisations, including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), as well as with the European Parliament. Through its dialogue with these organisations, the Assembly contributes to raising awareness about NATO and deepening mutual understanding.

### **C. THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF MEMBER STATES IN RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT NATO**

29. Nations play a crucial role in informing and educating their citizens about NATO. Key actors at the national level are governments – particularly ministries of defence, education, and foreign affairs – parliamentarians – since they have legislative powers and a direct link with their constituents – the military, schools, universities as well as the media and NGOs.

30. Allies who joined NATO relatively recently were required to have wide popular support for membership before obtaining accession. Information and communication campaigns were thus an integral part of the aspirants' quest for membership. These countries organised public lectures, workshops, debates, and media campaigns – among other activities – to inform and raise the level of public support. Such efforts largely continued even after membership was secured. Nations, in cooperation with NATO's PDD organise or sponsor events raising awareness of NATO's role, ranging from workshops, conferences, study visits, and seminars to exhibitions and sport competitions. Some Allies, such as Romania and Lithuania, hold a "NATO Day" to celebrate their country's accession to the Alliance.

31. The abovementioned survey conducted by the NATO PA Working Group highlighted that member states use various ways to raise awareness about NATO among their youth. In many countries, NATO is directly referred to in school curricula, either through a historical perspective or by addressing its importance in the modern security environment. For instance, young people in the Baltic states receive extensive information about NATO through their school curriculum. In all three countries, defence and security matters are included in the standard social science block and some chapters address NATO directly. In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science offers optional courses or study programmes which go deeper into NATO-related questions and give the students an opportunity to meet with members of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic States and Poland. The Ministry also provides Latvian pupils with informational packages to dispel

the most common myths about NATO. Additionally, as part of a comprehensive defence approach adopted in 2018, the Ministry is planning to introduce courses on national defence in all schools by 2024. The Baltic States also organise essay competitions, youth forums, and social media campaigns about NATO. Allies also contribute to educating about NATO by providing additional resources for teachers in cooperation with ministries of defence and education. For example, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Portugal offer training programmes for teachers that focus on national security and NATO. In addition, they engage younger generations outside the classroom, for instance via simulation games, school visits to NATO agencies, or military camp experiences. Some countries cooperate with other organisations to promote NATO values. For example, Luxembourg developed another noteworthy initiative by reaching out to organisations focusing on the protection of pupils from disinformation and hate speech, and on how they interact with national security and defence. The Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association created an online trivia game, NATONIA, to improve Estonians' knowledge of NATO.

### III. CASE STUDIES

#### A. ROMANIA

32. Romania was the second of the five pilot nations to join the *#WeAreNATO* campaign in 2017. The campaign is carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of National Education, which adapt the NATO-level framework to Romanian audiences. The campaign specifically targets young people. It aims to raise their knowledge of NATO's mission and values, its role in protecting Allied populations, as well as Romania's contribution to the mission of the Alliance.

33. These efforts, among others, have brought about a better understanding of NATO's role and objectives among the Romanian population, and as such higher levels of support for the Alliance. A large majority of the Romanian population supports the country's membership to the Alliance. In 2018, 85% of the population declared that Romania's NATO membership is positive for the country. Even categories that generally tend to be more sceptical showed strong support for the Alliance. Eighty-three per cent of women considered NATO membership to be positive for Romania. In addition, 80% of Romanians with only an elementary degree viewed Romania's participation in the Alliance as positive (International Republican Institute, 2018a). Younger citizens, however, placed less trust in NATO than other generations. A 2018 survey found that among Romanians declaring that they trust NATO, only 18% were between 18 and 29 years old. Likewise, 38% of 18-29-year-olds in the country think that NATO would not help Romania in case of an attack (Sultănescu, 2019). However, by the end of 2018, the *#WeAreNATO* campaign had already led to measurable increases in support for the Alliance. Eighty five per cent of young people in the 16-24 age range had heard of NATO (compared to 77% in 2016), 50% of key audiences believed that NATO is the best solution for maintaining peace and security (compared with 44% in 2016), and 25% of those interviewed associated NATO with words such as "unity, Alliance, together" (compared to 16% in 2016).

34. Since the *#WeAreNATO* campaign started, the authorities have continued to develop their own communication campaigns, such as "Romania – 15 years in NATO", which took place throughout 2019. They implemented a series of events directly involving young people and the armed forces. For instance, the Nicolae Bălcescu Academy of Land Forces established an educational project entitled "The aNATOMy of an Alliance", which ran from February to December 2019. Cadets first attended a series of seminars on NATO-related topics. In the second stage of the project, entitled "Young people train the youngest", they created a travelling exhibition displaying what they had learned. They went to high schools and universities across the country to present their achievements and disseminate this information. "The aNATOMy of an Alliance" also included events on the topic "Women in NATO". Romanian authorities also organised competitions on NATO-related themes, for instance through the creation of graphic art material, advertising products, informative booklets, and dissertations designed to address specific study programmes such as journalism, plastic arts,

security studies, and medicine. At the same time, authorities in Romania greatly focused on social media as a crucial channel to reach target audiences and deliver the *#WeAreNATO* message. The national campaigns were coordinated with NATO HQ in order to amplify the message using the Alliance's worldwide online reach.

35. Romania's active involvement in the *#WeAreNATO* campaign reflects its sustained efforts to inform and educate the population about NATO. The authorities have considerably focused on education about NATO at the school level. From the 6th grade, pupils study NATO-related topics such as "Countries of Europe in International Relations" during history and geography classes. Later on, they specifically learn about NATO through modules such as "Romania as a member of the UN, NATO and the EU" or "Romania and the Euro-Atlantic integration". Romania therefore chose a gradual approach, whereby the school curricula progressively exposes students to the role of NATO in the international environment. Romania also conducts activities that involve wider segments of the population. For instance, since 2005, it holds a NATO day every first Sunday of April to celebrate the country's accession to the Alliance. On this occasion, it organises military ceremonies, an Open Doors Day, cultural-artistic and sporting activities, symposia, and exhibitions.

## **B. MONTENEGRO**

36. In 2014, as Montenegro had already expressed its desire to become the 29th Ally, a poll found that only 35% of the Montenegrin population were in favour of joining the Alliance, while 45% opposed it. Several factors explained this hostility toward the Alliance. In addition to unfounded concerns related to the alleged loss of sovereignty and creation of military bases, Montenegro, as part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the time, was affected by the 1999 NATO air campaign. Moreover, Russia's influence in the country remains significant. Moscow has built on the common Slavic heritage and Christian Orthodox faith to disrupt Podgorica's path towards the West. In 2016, when Montenegro was on its way to joining NATO, Russia was widely seen as the force behind a coup d'état to prevent its accession to the Alliance. The Montenegrin authorities successfully prevented the coup, but the attempt underlined the necessity to secure public backing for membership (Maronkova, 2016).

37. As such, on its path to membership, the government of Montenegro set building public understanding of NATO and support for it as one of its priorities. To this effect, Podgorica created the Information Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration in 2012. The government also tried to improve communication about defence in general by establishing an expert group on security and by developing dialogue about the Ministry of Defence and its reforms. In addition, the authorities supported events organised by the civil society such as a roundtable on "Montenegro on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration – impact of NATO membership on economic development" (Government of Montenegro, 2013). After the Alliance officially invited Montenegro to begin accession talks in December 2015, the government and the Council for NATO membership set up a "Communication team for public dialogue" which, in cooperation with NGOs, the business community, academia, and political parties, aimed to increase awareness about NATO. They prepared annual communication plans as well as a manual on topics related to NATO membership.

38. NATO also implemented a public diplomacy programme to support Montenegro's accession. It thereby organised visits to the HQ in Brussels for politicians and key opinion-makers, as well as press tours for the Montenegrin media during NATO events. In addition, the Alliance offered grants to support events, such as conferences or educational projects, which raised awareness about the benefits of membership (Maronkova, 2016).

39. Despite these improvements, public opinion about NATO remains divided in the country. In October 2017, a few months only after joining the Alliance, 51% of the population still opposed membership and 54% held a negative view of the role of NATO in the world. A year later, public support had only slightly increased, with 49% still opposing membership. Polls show that this relatively low level of support goes hand in hand with the fact that citizens are still largely misinformed

about NATO. In 2018, 50% of Montenegrins thought that membership in NATO requires foreign troops to be based in the country. Likewise, 51% thought that major powers control NATO and the country would have to go along with NATO actions even if it were contrary to its values (International Republican Institute, 2017; National Democratic Institute, 2018).

40. Thus, public diplomacy activities in Montenegro remain a central tenet of NATO's actions in the country. The Alliance continues to engage with Montenegrins by supporting the organisation of conferences and workshops. For instance, in cooperation with local think tanks and NGOs, it funded the project "Let's Take a Stance for Future Perspectives: Youth Alliance and NATO", that enabled more than 120 high school students to speak with ambassadors of NATO member states. In June 2019, it also supported a regional workshop on the topic "New Perspectives on Shared Security – NATO's Next 70 Years: Wars of ideas. Hybrid warfare, political interference and disinformation" that brought together members from the public, NATO officials and key regional stakeholders. In addition, the Government of Montenegro adopted in 2018 a multi-month "Communication Strategy – Montenegro NATO member", established in cooperation with the United Kingdom. In this framework, in 2019, NATO PDD launched the #WeAreNATO campaign in the Montenegrin media to provide more information to citizens about their country's membership.

### C. SERBIA

41. Public approval of Serbia's relationship with NATO has traditionally been very low. A 2018 poll found that 80% of Serbians would vote against NATO membership, with 64% being "absolutely against" (National Democratic Institute, 2018). Just like in Montenegro, negative public opinion stems primarily from the country's past relations with NATO and the Allies, especially the Alliance's intervention against selected targets in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 1999 air campaign during the Kosovo crisis, and the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008 – recognised by many NATO countries (Slovak Atlantic Commission, 2013).

42. Other factors add up to this complicated basis, as misperceptions about NATO are still widespread among Serbia's population. A first set is directly related to the 1999 air campaign, which many view as a manifestation that NATO wanted to defuse Serbia's power in the former Yugoslavia and to install military bases in the country. Another common misperception reduces NATO's role to the promotion of US foreign policy interests. In addition, like in Montenegro, Russia plays on shared Orthodox and Slavic roots to wage influence in the country. Moscow's support to Belgrade against Kosovo's independence and through energy supplies is also contributing to Russia's influence in Serbia. Eighty-five per cent of the population thinks that Serbia's interests are best served by maintaining strong relations with Russia, compared with 23% with NATO (International Republican Institute, 2018b). The perception of relations with NATO and Russia as a zero-sum game is widespread, and politicians frequently present Serbia's self-declaration of neutrality as incompatible with further cooperation with NATO, although NATO fully respects Belgrade's military neutrality (Slovak Atlantic Commission, 2013).

43. The Serbian population generally has poor knowledge of the extent of NATO-Serbia cooperation. Serbia has been participating in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme since 2006. The Allies have supported a number of NATO Trust Fund projects in Serbia, notably to help with the disposal of ammunition (NATO, 2019a). NATO cooperates frequently with the Serbian Armed Forces to build capabilities and interoperability. In 2016 and 2017 alone, Serbia participated in 25 bilateral and multinational military exercises with NATO and the PfP countries. In 2018, Belgrade hosted for the first time a large scale NATO-led exercise. Serbia also regularly trains Allies and partners at the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Training Centre in Kruševac. Yet these exercises and training remain largely in the shadow of those conducted with Russia (European Western Balkans, 2017).

44. Both Serbia and NATO acknowledge the importance of strengthening public diplomacy and have taken steps in this direction. The first Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) was adopted in

2015 and defined public diplomacy as one of the key areas of cooperation. It thereby led the Serbian authorities to propose a series of actions to raise awareness about NATO. They included the organisation of visits to NATO HQ, event sponsorship by NATO PDD and the evolution of the role of the NATO military liaison office in Belgrade, which now also provides support with public diplomacy and political dialogue.

45. Yet the gap between facts and the way they are presented to the public underlines that public diplomacy is “the weakest link” of the partnership (European Western Balkans, 2017). Fifty-two per cent of Serbians get information about their country’s cooperation with NATO from television, which only partly covers the topic. For instance, most media did not mention the Secretary General’s statement expressing regrets for the loss of innocent lives during the NATO bombing – only 31% of the population was aware of this. Moreover, a media analysis conducted between 2017 and 2018 found that NATO is most frequently portrayed with a negative tone in the Serbian media. Fourteen per cent of the population said they do not receive any information about NATO (National Democratic Institute, 2018). It is therefore crucial to increase outreach to the Serbian media.

#### **D. UKRAINE**

46. Relations between NATO and Ukraine have greatly developed since the independence of Ukraine and particularly in the wake of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. After the end of the Cold War, Ukraine and NATO gradually opted for a close partnership, materialised first by Ukraine’s joining of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the PfP in 1994. In 1997, they signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, thereby establishing a distinct consultation body between Kyiv and the Alliance, the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC). The 2009 Declaration to Complement the Charter reinforced the NUC’s role in supporting Ukraine’s reforms towards its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. This extensive framework has allowed for deep cooperation between NATO and Kyiv, in areas ranging from peace-support operations, hybrid warfare, defence and security sector reform to civil preparedness and legal dialogue. Among other initiatives, in 2017, NATO and Ukraine established a joint Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare to better coordinate the identification of hybrid threats and strengthen their ability to respond to such threats (NATO, 2019).

47. Similarly, the NATO PA has developed strong ties with Ukraine since the country achieved independence in 1991. At the time, the Ukrainian Parliament became an associate member. In 1997, the NATO PA and Ukraine established a Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) to ensure parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the newly adopted Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. In 2002, Ukraine declared its interest in becoming a NATO member, and the JMG became the Ukraine-NATO Interparliamentary Council (UNIC). The UNIC is composed of representatives from each of the Assembly’s five Committees and leading members of the Ukrainian Parliament. This forum provides a platform for parliamentarians to discuss NATO-Ukraine cooperation and issues of concern. As such, it is a valuable tool in efforts to raise awareness about NATO in Ukraine among parliamentarians and the broader public, and to foster mutual understanding between Ukraine and NATO.

48. Given this extensive partnership, informing the population about the scope of NATO-Ukraine cooperation and the role of the Alliance as a provider of security is crucial. In 1997, NATO and Ukraine established in Kyiv NATO’s first information office in a partner country – the NATO Information and Documentation Centre (NIDC). It has been a crucial vehicle to promote a better understanding and awareness of NATO’s role and priorities among Ukrainians. The NIDC proposes seminars, roundtables, and other communication projects. It has organised over 200 study trips for Ukrainian politicians, students, journalists, and academics to NATO HQ. In addition, it provided key support to Ukraine’s civil society during the Revolution of Dignity. It notably helped the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre and the Kyiv Post newspaper on factual reporting from Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. It also financially supported grassroots movements striving to debunk Moscow’s propaganda (Maronkova, 2017). Another important role of the NIDC is providing support to the public diplomacy efforts of the Ukrainian authorities. In 2015, NATO and Ukraine signed a Strategic

Communications Partnership Roadmap with the aim to improve Ukraine's StratCom capabilities, assist the development of a StratCom culture, and ensure that the highest standards of accuracy and ethics are maintained (NATO, 2019b).

49. The Ukrainian authorities are aware of the need to improve public knowledge about NATO, particularly in the face of the increased dissemination by Russia of propaganda and disinformation directed at the Ukrainian public since 2014. Every year, the government carries out an Action Plan on the implementation of the Concept for improving public awareness on Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. The implementation of the Action Plan is then analysed by a working group. The government thereby communicates about measures such as the expansion of NATO-Ukraine cooperation, the reform of domestic security structures, the modernisation of Ukrainian military education, but also more generally the Alliance's support to Ukraine as well as NATO's history, current activities, and main principles. Communication activities include exhibitions; conferences and information sessions; workshops, seminars and nation-wide competitions for students; information campaigns with a series of TV products for national and regional channels, radio programmes, videos for social media as well as information and explanatory printed materials (booklets, comics, etc.) distributed hand-to-hand. The total audience of these various activities is estimated at 35.3 million (State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine, 2018). Civil society also contributes to these information efforts. In January 2020, the Union of Teachers of Public Disciplines and Civic Education, supported by the British government, introduced a training course and a manual aimed primarily at high school and university professors. The handbook highlights NATO's role in protecting civilians, as well as upholding democratic values and international law (Ukrinform, 2020).

50. These communication efforts have produced tangible results, visible in the evolution of public opinion about joining the Alliance. In 2012, as few as 15% of Ukrainians were in favour of joining NATO. Following the Euro-Maidan revolution and subsequent Russian aggression, support for NATO increased considerably. However, in March 2014, only 34% of Ukrainians said they would vote to join NATO, while 43% still said they would vote against. Popular support for the Alliance fluctuated throughout the next months and years, peaking at 46% in April 2017, but only to drop to 34% six months later. Since then, however, support has steadily increased. In June 2019, a majority (53%) of the population expressed support for membership, with only 29% opposing it. The youth is particularly favourable, with 59% of 18 to 35-year-olds expressing support for membership (International Republican Institute, 2019). Likewise, a poll conducted by the Centre for Applied Research found that from March to November 2019, the proportion of Ukrainians who consider themselves well-informed about the Alliance has increased by 6%, thus reaching 21%. There are, however, significant regional discrepancies: 80% of the population in western Ukraine supports accession, while only 29% do in eastern Ukraine (International Republican Institute, 2019).

51. NATO's public diplomacy efforts could, according to feedback from Ukrainian officials, benefit from a few adjustments. Printed rather than digital material would be easier to circulate in some regions of the country. Moreover, financial and grant policies of NATO member states' embassies in Ukraine have so far focused on European integration issues such as corruption, decentralisation, or gender issues. Although these issues are crucial, projects aiming at Euro-Atlantic integration would also benefit from financial support. Ultimately, however, it is the responsibility of the Ukrainian authorities themselves to determine information and education policies in Ukraine.

#### **IV. WINNING THE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES: NATO'S COMMUNICATION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

52. NATO's information and education efforts have become particularly crucial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus outbreak has led to a flood of disinformation about, on the one hand, the origins and nature of the virus and the health measures needed to prevent it from spreading and, on the other, the response of NATO and individual Allies to the crisis. These malicious messages aim to sow confusion and doubt among the public and erode the trust citizens

place in their government's response and in NATO. The proliferation of disinformation makes it harder for Allies to ensure that science-based public health messages on how to prevent the spread of the virus reach the public, and therefore worsens the impact of the virus. As such, it threatens the security of all Allied countries and the resilience of their societies.

53. Representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) said that false claims "were spreading faster than the virus" in what they described as a worldwide "infodemic" (Richtel, 2020). In this battle of narratives, disinformation has been used to destabilise Allied countries. Some false rumours, conspiracy theories, and misleading claims are spread by everyday citizens of NATO member states, but many others are promoted by foreign governments, mainly those of Russia and China (Fisher, 2020). Russian efforts to spread disinformation about the outbreak in NATO member states, both online and through traditional media, seek to discredit Allied governments' responses to the pandemic and risk aggravating the public health crisis (Rankin, 2020). Chinese media and officials have also taken to spreading coronavirus-related conspiracy theories to shift reputational consequences away from China. Both countries have heavily communicated about having sent medical supplies to countries around the world, including to Allies, to portray themselves as responsible global powers, promote their authoritarian governance model and, in the case of NATO countries, undermine public trust in governments and their reaction to the crisis.

54. At the very beginning of the crisis, while NATO was primarily focused on developing its operational response to the outbreak, Russian and Chinese propaganda partially overshadowed NATO's communication about mutual help among Allies and the role played by the organisation in tackling the crisis. This occurred despite Allied solidarity having by far outweighed the support provided to NATO member states by China and Russia. Allies and partner countries are supporting each other through logistical assistance, the provision and transport of medical professionals and equipment, and the establishment of a stockpile of medical supplies. NATO helps facilitate and coordinate these efforts, particularly through the work of its Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and its Support and Procurement Agency. It also promotes the exchange among member states, as well as with partner countries, of best practices relating to their response to the crisis.

55. However, as the crisis intensified, NATO was able to adapt and strengthen its communication efforts, partly in response to Beijing's and Moscow's aggressive disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Since then, NATO has adopted an Action Plan on countering disinformation in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, NATO has firstly increased its ability to understand the new informational environment created by the pandemic by monitoring and analysing disinformation and propaganda messages disseminated by hostile actors. Secondly, by embedding the insights it develops through this analysis into its communication, NATO is able to engage in a more tailored and targeted fashion with the public. Thanks to this approach, NATO has been able to actively disseminate information about the concrete measures it has undertaken and to effectively counter hostile disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

56. In addition, NATO has strengthened the coordination of its efforts to counter propaganda and disinformation with other organisations, including the G7, the United Nations and the EU, which underpins efforts to both understand the information environment and engage its audiences. With the EU in particular, NATO had already signed a Joint Declaration in 2016 aiming to deepen their strategic partnership. Coordination efforts between their respective staffs in the area of strategic communications have since then focused on tackling the threat of disinformation and propaganda through increased information exchange, capacity development, and mutual alerting. NATO and the EU also coordinated the production of communication messages on relevant issues to external audiences. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the heightened dissemination of disinformation and propaganda it resulted in, they intensified their cooperation and further coordinated their response to this common threat.

57. As stated in the declaration issued by NATO Foreign Ministers after their meeting in April 2020, “Allies are working together to ensure public access to transparent, timely, and accurate information, which is critical to overcoming this pandemic and to combating disinformation”. The Alliance does not respond to propaganda with propaganda. Rather, NATO takes a fact-based approach to counter disinformation and propaganda. In doing so, it also contributes to better informing and educating the public about the positive role that the Alliance plays in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and about the strength of the bond that unites NATO member states. Ultimately, by effectively countering harmful and false narratives about the response of Allied nations and the organisation itself, NATO builds up public trust in national governments and ultimately helps foster support for the Alliance.

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

58. Since the creation of the PDD, NATO has dramatically progressed when it comes to informing and educating the public about the Alliance. The PDD has engaged in important adaptations, among which the adoption of the campaign approach, which significantly changed the scope and scale of NATO’s communication activities. This illustrates the switch towards audience-driven communications. The PDD has also sought to build closer links between policymaking and communication planning. This has translated into the presence of communicators at every decision-making meeting at NATO, ensuring that strategic communications proactively contribute to policy formulation.

59. Despite these improvements, several factors continue to limit the success of NATO’s information and education activities. The first constraint relates to the insufficient level of financial resources allocated to fulfilling NATO’s education and information mandate. As NATO moves from traditional public diplomacy to a more ambitious strategic communication area, this transformation has not been sufficiently backed with an adequate rise in funding and manpower. Organisations with similarly ambitious communication strategies, such as the EU institutions, are endowed with much more substantial resources. NATO must ensure that its communication ambitions and capabilities match. Given the specific nature of the organisation and its emphasis on defence and security, there are natural limits for NATO to act as mass communicator and producer of contents that would compete for public attention with leading media and other contemporary influencers. That said, NATO certainly needs to adapt the way it communicates to the new realities of the information space, but this adaptation needs to be underpinned by an adequate increase in financial, technological, and human resources for the PDD.

60. Second, involvement in strategic communications among Allies and other NATO stakeholders has been strikingly unequal. It seems that much of the *#WeAreNATO* communication activities are carried out by the Enhanced Forward Presence units rather than by the member states. There has therefore been limited implementation of the *#WeAreNATO* campaign, even in countries which are the strongest contributors to the eFP, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, or which were originally pilot nations for the campaign, such as the United Kingdom and Canada. Moreover, Allies missed obvious occasions to communicate about the role of NATO in promoting peace and security, such as the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, or the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (Merheim-Eyre and Jacobs, 2019). The 2015 survey conducted by the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence to map StratCom practices in NATO countries was another example. Only 11 of (then) 28 nations responded to it. Most of the responding nations were countries directly threatened by adversarial information activities (Osborne, 2015).

61. Moreover, at the NATO as well as the national level, militaries have been less involved than civilian structures. Analyses of NATO’s StratCom structures have found that at the NATO level, the Military Committee could have done more to link political and military StratCom objectives. As such, StratCom intentions are only partly translated into operational realities. At the national level, at the time of the above-mentioned survey by the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, there was no military public diplomacy training in the responding countries. This reflects the need to train



military personnel in this field. Since NATO draws its forces from national capabilities, insufficiencies in communication and information-related competencies of national military staff directly impact NATO's ability to inform and educate (Boudreau, 2016).

62. Member states should provide a more substantial contribution, particularly in areas in which they have a mandate and the PDD has none, such as education policies. Converting their apparent fondness for strategic communications into concrete actions, nations should provide additional efforts to translate this into the development of appropriate capabilities. They should particularly target their military sector, where the importance of information and education is still largely under-appreciated. Naturally, the role of parliamentarians is crucial in supporting these efforts.

63. NATO should better coordinate its communication efforts with national authorities in Allied and partner countries in order to avoid duplication. Moreover, priority should be given in the allocation of support and resources to those Allies and partners that face specific vulnerabilities, and low levels of knowledge and understanding of the Alliance.

64. Third, although they constitute an efficient medium to reach out to large audiences, online communication instruments should not be overestimated. NATO's online tools play a crucial role in its communication and are central elements in the Alliance's efforts to denounce and counter disinformation and propaganda. However, they generally rely on the assumption that the target audience has the technical capacity to access information and that citizens make the active choice to follow the relevant platforms, which is not always the case. In addition, most state structures and international organisations do not generate exciting content and have few followers (Merheim-Eyre and Jacobs, 2019). Therefore, NATO should use online instruments effectively. Depending on the national and regional context, adequate attention should be paid to traditional communication instruments such as broadcasts or printed materials.

65. Fourth, NATO's communication policy should pay more attention to listening, thus ensuring that public opinion informs policy. This is particularly true when it comes to public opinion beyond NATO's borders. This report discussed outreach activities to the Alliance's Eastern European and Balkan partners, but it is also necessary to re-evaluate NATO's outreach efforts on its Southern flank. Since 1997, the Alliance has carried out operations to assist Muslim populations in seven non-member countries. Yet, there are no NATO information offices in the Middle East, Asia, or Africa (Boudreau, 2016). By putting greater emphasis on listening activities, NATO would identify negative trends before they develop into crises (Schindler, 2015). It is therefore necessary for NATO to widen participation to other audiences.

66. At the grassroots level, organisations from the civil society provide access to new information and resources and can thereby be a good vehicle of public opinion. Moreover, these grassroots initiatives require little financial support and can help NATO to actively mobilise its target groups.

67. Young professionals and experts should also be given a more prominent and meaningful role in NATO-related events, either by inviting them as speakers, or by involving them in solving complex security issues. Innovation challenges and competitions with concrete policy implications are excellent occasions to incentivise the participation of younger generations. Finally, as explained earlier, Millennials in most NATO countries are less interested in hard security issues. It would therefore be relevant for NATO to emphasise other aspects of security, such as environment or humanitarian assistance (Hilton, 2019). In addition, Allies could follow the example of Romania and Lithuania and establish a common official day dedicated to the Alliance and its achievements. Such an annual event would contribute to increasing awareness about NATO among the public, particularly among younger generations.

68. Parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in reaching out to the public and communicating about NATO at the national and local levels. Visits to schools and universities are a particularly effective way to engage the youth and discuss the importance of transatlantic relations and how

NATO membership benefits Allies. The report of the Assembly's Working Group provides a list of best national practices on this topic, including ways of incorporating discussions on NATO and global security into school curricula, promoting extra-curricular activities (for instance, simulation games, visits to the HQ, competitions on cyber defence, etc.), providing additional resources and training to teachers, and establishing cooperation between schools and the military as well as civil society. These examples could be replicated across the Alliance, and parliamentarians in NATO countries are well placed to facilitate this process domestically. Former NATO PA President Madeleine Moon (United Kingdom) prepared a sample lesson to increase knowledge about and understanding of NATO. She proposed several class activities to engage pupils, such as watching videos offered by NATO on its YouTube channel, organising brainstorming about NATO and collective defence, or creating a NATO-style vision statement. In the latter, pupils need to formulate an overall goal for the class (e.g., no bullying) and ideas on how to get there by respecting NATO's decision-making procedures.

69. NATO should also seek to attract new stakeholders: women, but also individuals usually less interested in defence and security, such as those with backgrounds in science or business. These stakeholders should be more visible in campaigns, in order to display images of defence and security that draw a larger audience. The *#WeAreNATO* video of a Norwegian female tank commander Lt. Silje Johansen Willassen illustrates how NATO can communicate about women's empowerment. NATO also successfully called on young spokespersons to communicate about its activities, as it did with Norwegian Lt. Lasse Løkken Matberg who covered *Trident Juncture 2018* on his Instagram account. NATO should continue to reinforce its efforts in this area.

70. Cooperating with other institutions and organisations can contribute to NATO's information efforts as well. The Alliance should continue fostering strong relations with international organisations such as the EU, the UN, and regional security organisations as well as deepen partnerships with the academic community and the private sector. Thereby, it could benefit from a wide range of expertise while reaching out to a bigger audience. Moreover, by cooperating with bodies whose focus is rather political or civilian, NATO could also emphasise aspects of its activities that are more positively connotated, such as crisis prevention, crisis response, and peacebuilding. This would help the Alliance to promote a narrative based on global peace rather than hard security, which resonates better with most citizens of NATO countries (Roumeliotis, 2018).

71. NATO must continue and intensify its efforts to tackle disinformation and propaganda. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, individual citizens as well as foreign governments, particularly those of Russia and China, are circulating false rumours and inaccurate claims among the public. These malevolent messages undermine the response of Allied governments to the crisis and, as such, pose a threat to the security of the Alliance. Stepping up NATO's answer to this phenomenon requires additional financial and human resources and a greater focus on strategic communications. This would help NATO intensify and better calibrate its information efforts and thus ensure that factual and reliable information about the response of the Alliance and its members reaches the public. In addition, NATO should continue to deepen its partnerships with international organisations facing the same disinformation and propaganda threats, particularly with the European Union. The same is true with partner countries. Such cooperation provides an opportunity to share best practices in countering these threats. It also ensures that NATO and these organisations and partners all speak with one voice, thus clarifying and amplifying the message that they are trying to convey to the public.

72. Finally, NATO today is adapting to new challenges, and so should its public diplomacy narrative. In recent years, it has increasingly had to focus on countering emerging threats posed by, among others, the rise of China, the growing dissemination of propaganda and disinformation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, NATO needs to communicate to the public why and how its role is evolving in reaction to these menaces and how it intends to respond to future threats. The *NATO 2030* reflection process is a welcome opportunity for NATO to reassess its public

communication efforts in light of the new challenges it faces. The Rapporteur calls for the importance of informing and educating about NATO to be fully taken into account as part of this process.

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